

**President's Address  
Rice Auditorium  
September 19, 2022**

Good morning. First, I'd like to take a moment to recognize that the place we are today is the traditional and contemporary homelands of indigenous peoples and nations. I encourage you to spend time considering these histories and connect them to your own. After all, so much has happened to bring us all to this place, in this moment, in this room, together. And if there is anything I can impress upon you today, it is that we are strong if we are together. And together does not mean being the same; togetherness is defined by the beautiful harmony of differences singing the same song, working towards the same goal.

Here are the things I know about Western Oregon University: Everyone I have talked to about WOU has had positive things to say. More than that, they have been passionate about the quality of education and the transformational experiences students receive. Our Board of Trustees understand the uniqueness of this university, and they are here to support its success however they can. Our Alumni talk about the "real" education they received at WOU, education that was hands-on and filled with teachers and mentors who cared, education that altered the trajectories of their lives and empowered them to make positive impacts in the world. We serve exceptional students, many of whom are first or second generation. We have an increasingly diverse student body, a large percentage of whom are Latinx. We are an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution. We are the oldest public institution in Oregon, and one of the oldest on the west coast. The campus is in the beautiful Willamette valley, and it holds and supports our campus, gifting us with the space to do the positive work we do. And all of you here today know all of this. This is a special place, isn't it?

I came to WOU because I felt all of these things, and I can see so very clearly a future in which this university, along with its staff, students, and faculty, is thriving. But at the same time, I have concerns. One thing you will learn about me is that I am honest,

and I think it is hard for us to move forward together if we don't all understand where we are today. So, I'd like to show you a few data points that I feel are important as we consider where we are at this moment.

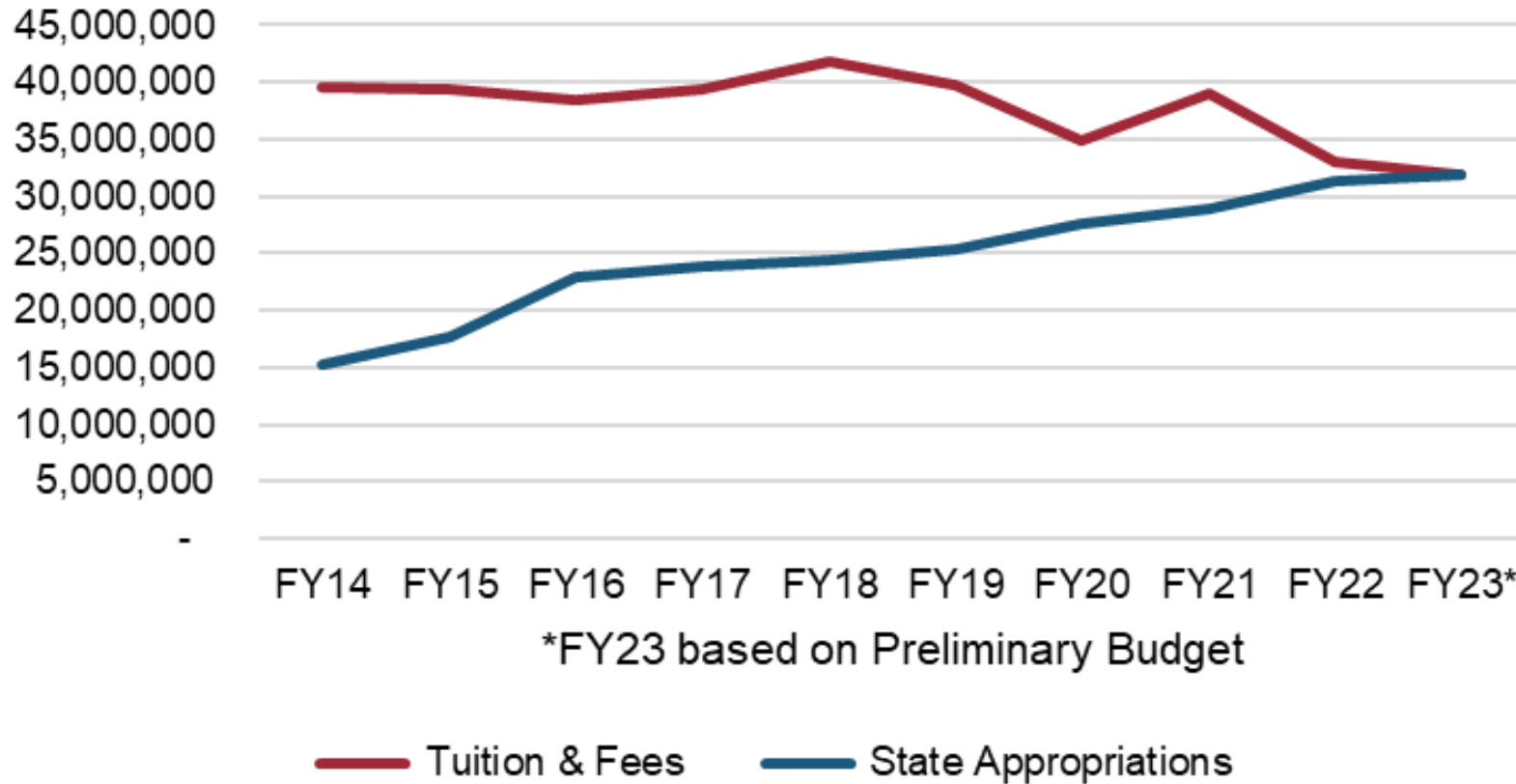
# Imagining the Future Together

**Dr. Jesse Peters**  
**September 19, 2022**

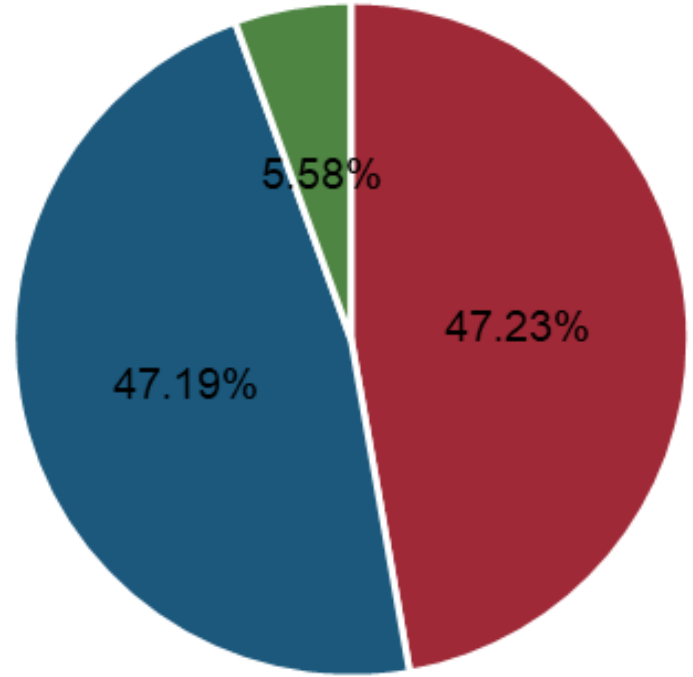
## The Power of WOU

- Employees have a passion for our mission
- The Board of Trustees believe in and support our success
- Alumni speak highly of the education they received
- The students we serve are exceptional
- The place where WOU is located is exceptional

## Education & General Fund Revenues

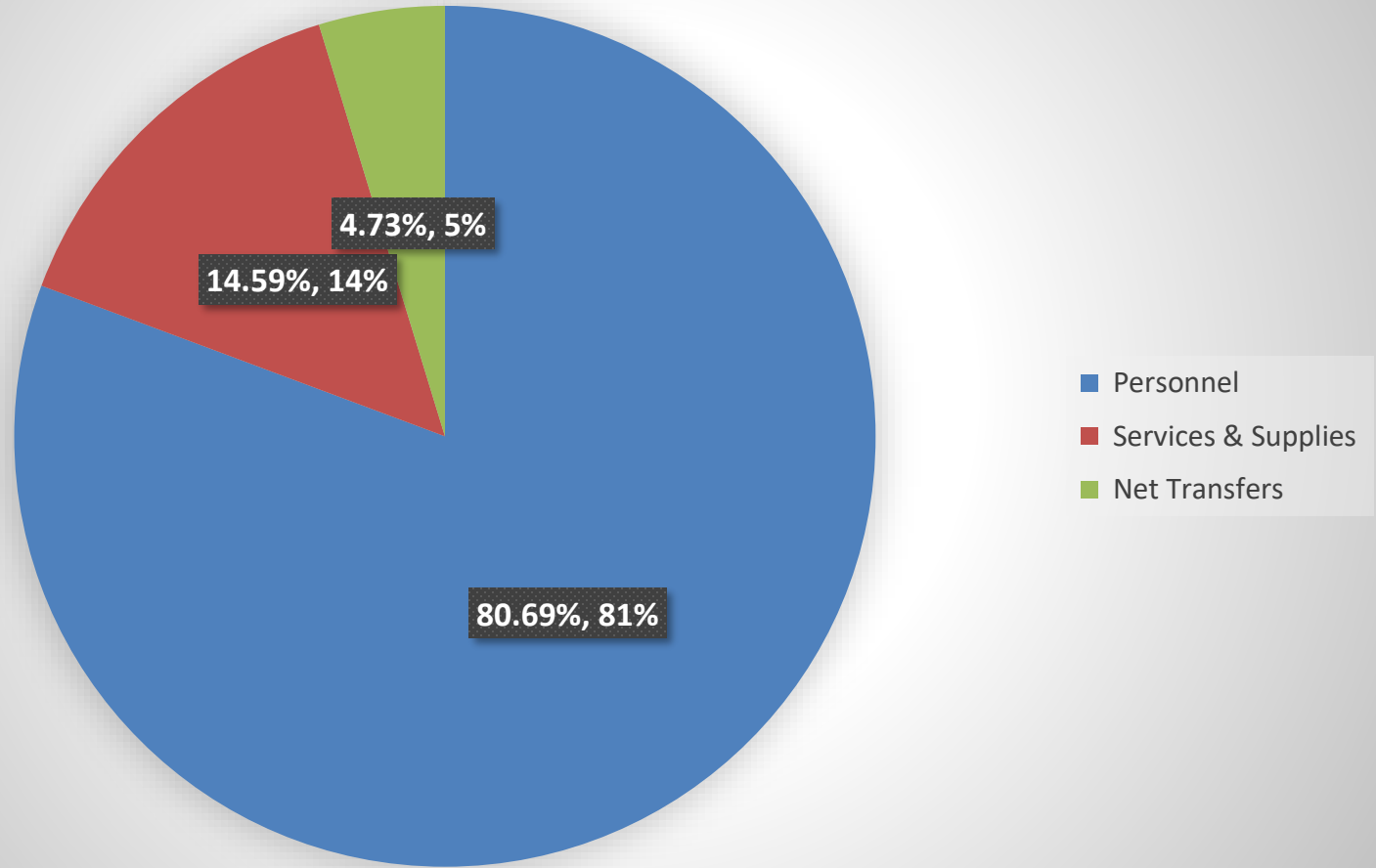


## FY23 Education & General Fund Revenues

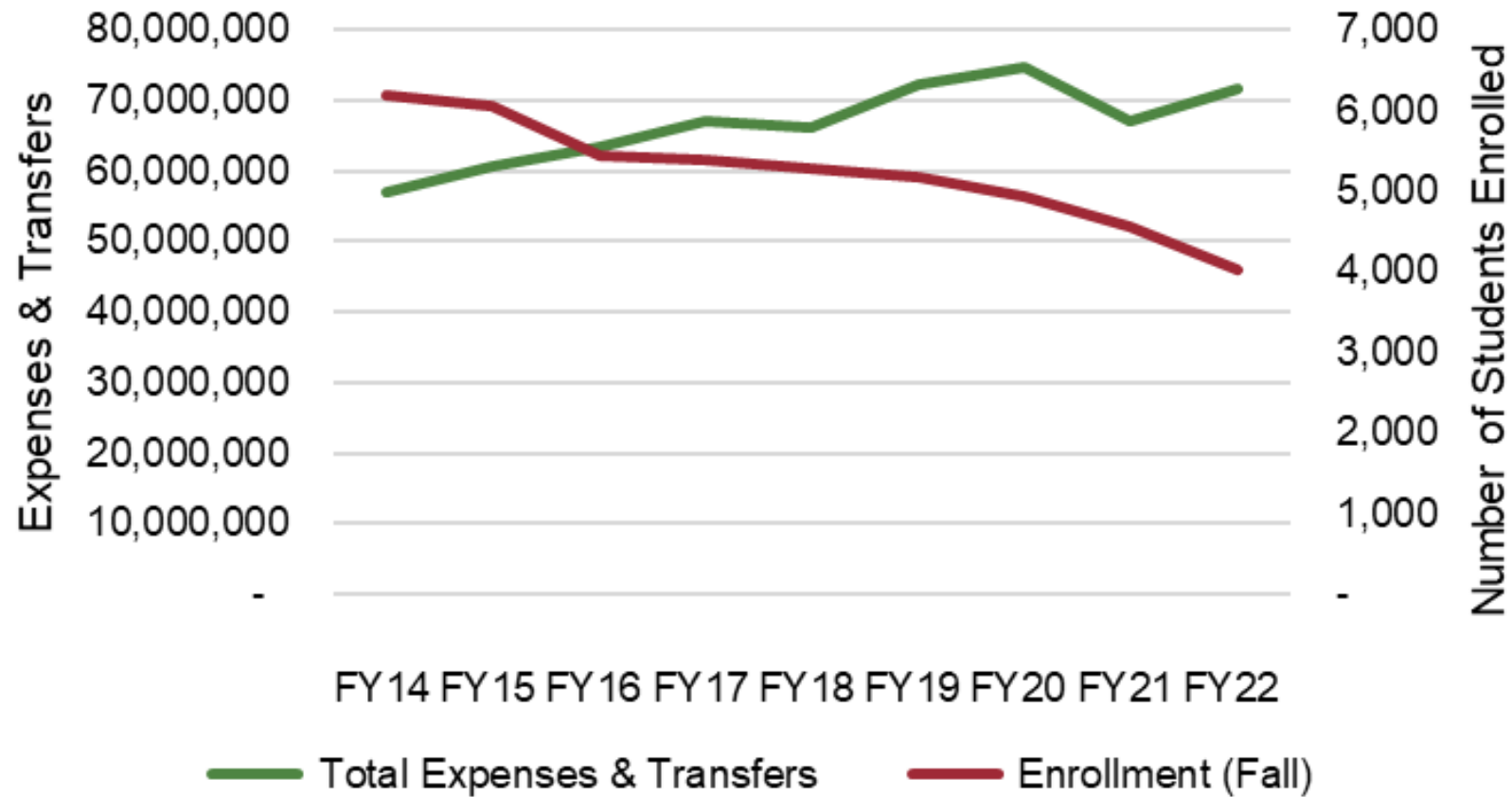


■ Tuition & Fees   ■ State Appropriations   ■ Other

### FY23 Education & General Fund Expenses

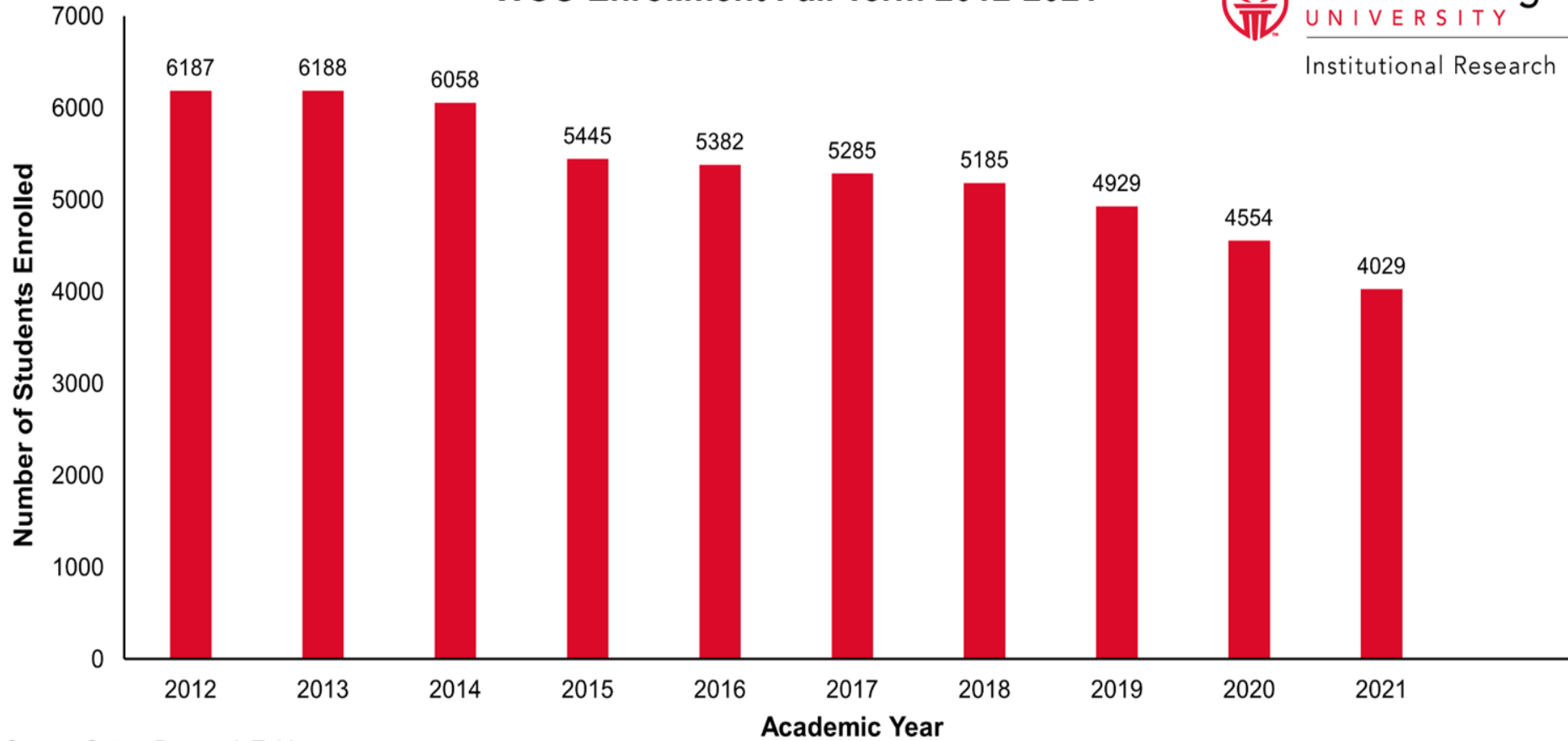


## Enrollment & E&G Expense Trends





### WOU Enrollment Fall Term 2012-2021

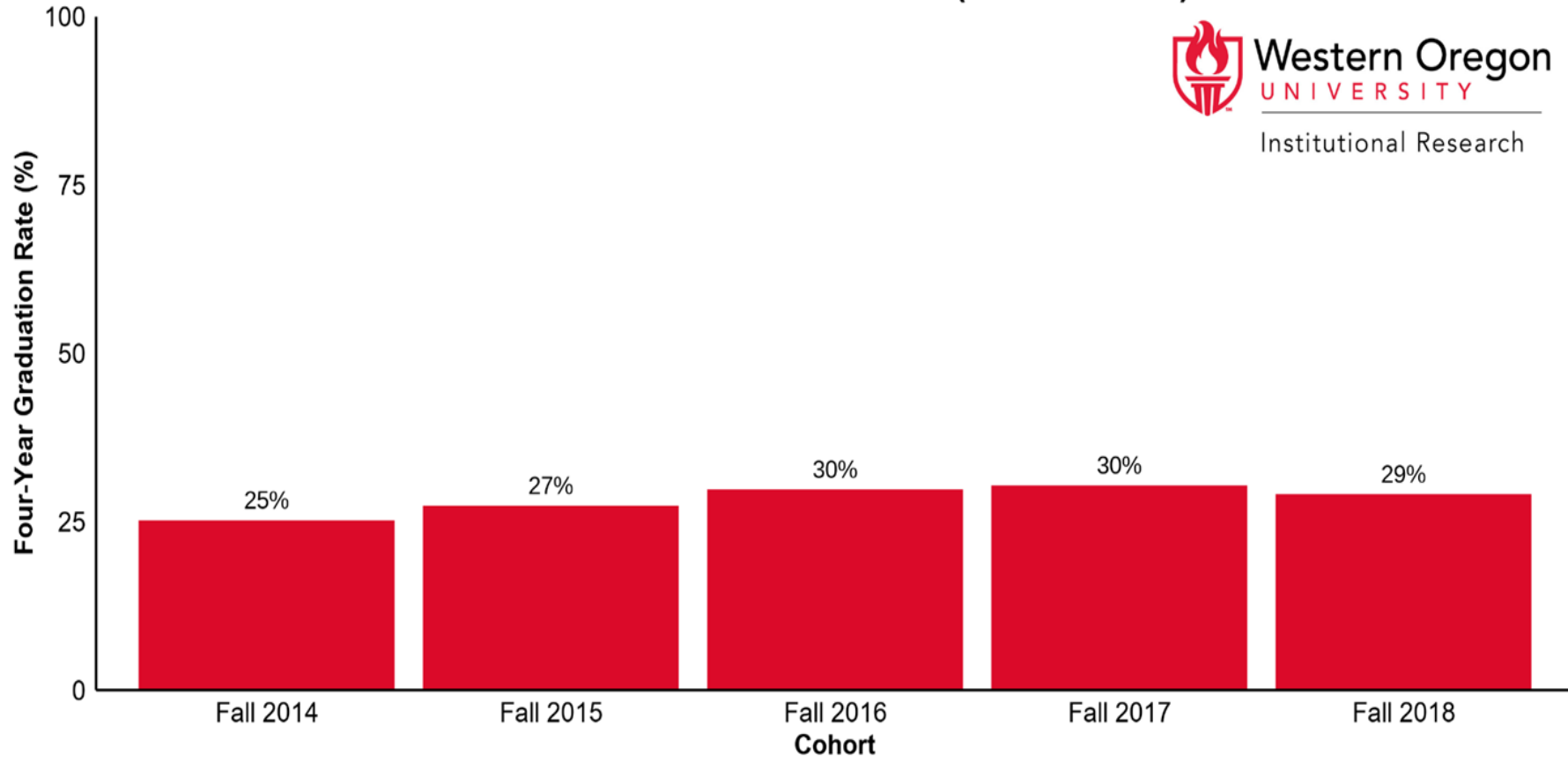


Source: Saturn Research Tables

## Enrollment Challenges

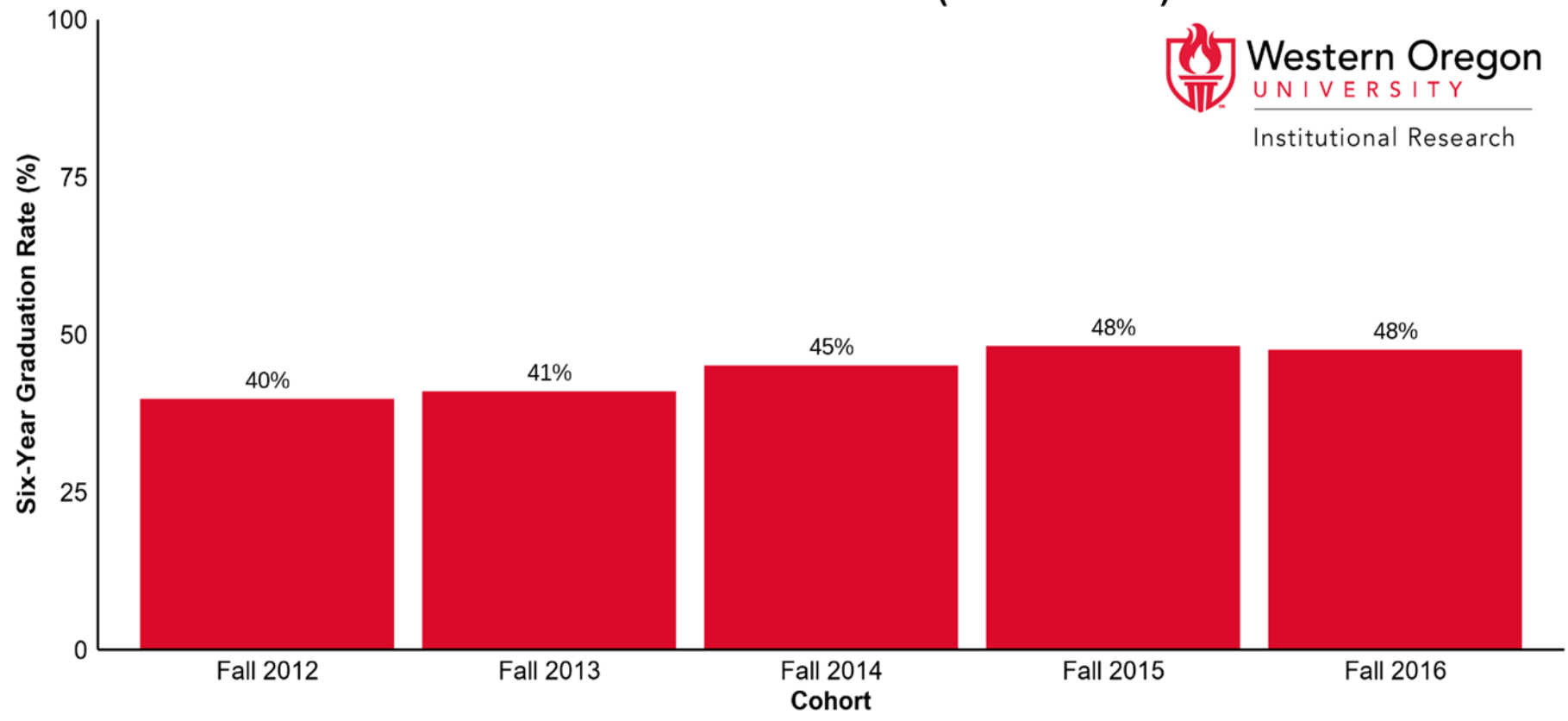
- High school graduates in Oregon will decrease by 3.4% over the next 15 years.
- Of high school graduates in Oregon, only 49% go directly to college.
- Most states have seen a decline in higher ed enrollment over the last 10 years.
- In the next 25 years, Oregon's population of traditional college-aged people will stagnate or decline. Most growth will be in citizens over age 30.
- The big institutions of higher ed are growing, thus taking a larger market share.
- The economy is good right now, so more people are delaying or rejecting college. COVID had negative effects on families and communities.
- Students in Oregon bear more of a cost burden than the national average.

### Four-Year Graduation Rate (Last 5 Years)



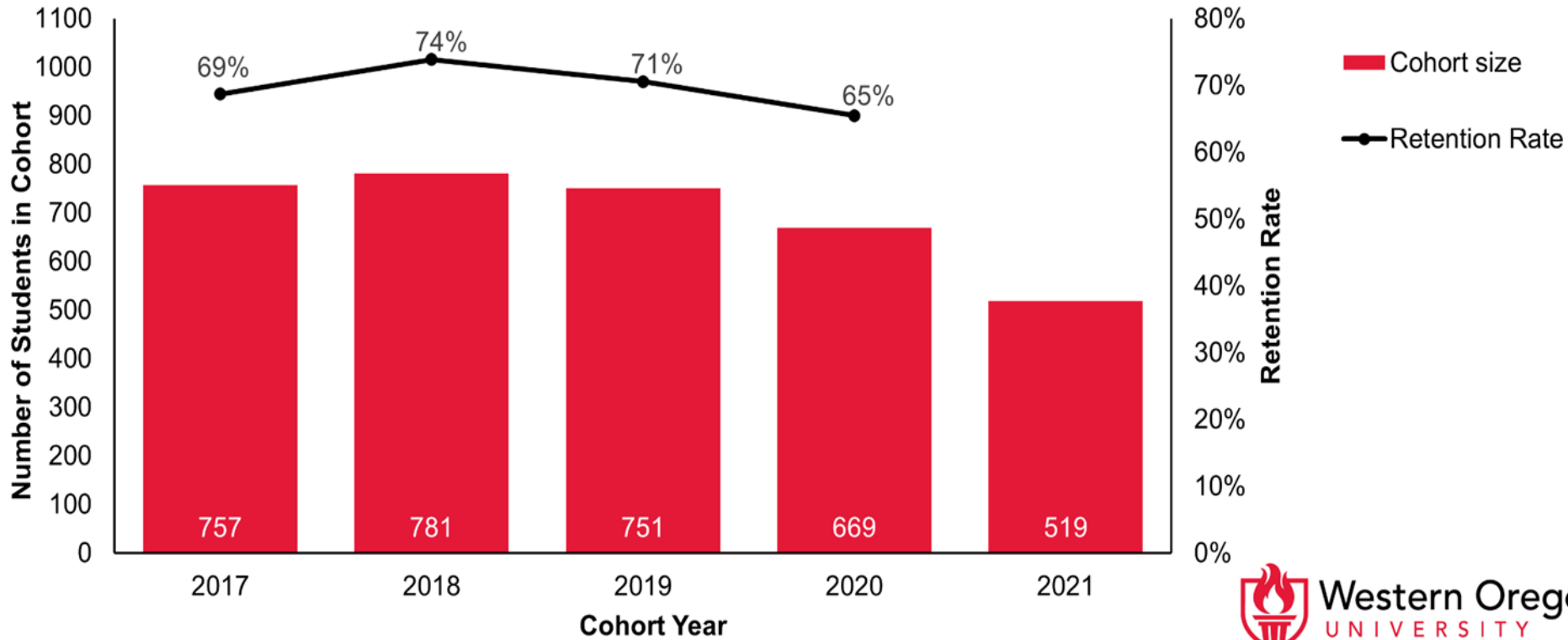
Source: SCARF and Saturn Tables

### Six-Year Graduation Rate (Last 5 Years)



Source: SCARF and Saturn Tables

### WOU Retention Rate 2017-2021



Source: SCARF and Saturn Research Tables

## Positive Indicators

- Number of new students is up from last year
- Number of graduate students is up from last year
- Grant activity is up: 66.9% higher than previous year
- Teams are already working to address recruiting, admitting, and retaining students  
Enrollment Management Group  
SSA and stop-out students: 98% of 371 completed or on track  
Admissions & MarCom accomplished much under difficult circumstances
- There is positive energy and a desire for new strategies

## Strategies for the Future

- Data Driven Admissions Strategies (EAB Partnerships)
- Clear and Robust Marketing and Communications (Digital Presence)
- Academic Programs that Attract New Students & Serve Community
- Strategic Use of WOU Salem (Degree Completion, Graduate Programs, etc.)
- DEIA & WOU's Identity (Equity Audit; HSI Adv. Committee; Compliance)
- Focused Combined Campaign & Fundraising (Alumni & Foundation)
- Expand Grant Opportunities (Seeking Title III Grant 22-23)
- Explore COPLAC Membership (Identity Differentiation)
- Strengthening Student Support Systems (Student Success Building; Dest. W)
- Visionary & Executable Strategic Planning (2023)

# Goal

## 5000 Students in Five Years

- 1) Increases in New Undergraduate Students
- 2) Increases in Retention Rates
- 3) Increase in Transfer Students
- 4) Increase in Graduate Students



**We must tell WOU's story in better ways and to more people.**

**We must focus on student success and retention as a team.  
It's everyone's job.**

**We must be willing to engage with each other in a spirit of innovation.**

**We must be willing to move fast and make mistakes.**

**We must deliver on the promise of WOU.**

## Building Capacity

- VP of Advancement
- Executive Director of HR
- Director of Admissions
- Director of Marketing and Communications
- PIO / Social Media
- Director of Government Relations
- Assistant Director of DEI / Title IX Coordinator

## Building Community

WOU has several key ingredients to make it an even more successful university: a diverse student body, a commitment to DEI initiatives, dedicated staff and faculty, and a focus on student success. All of that can and should lead to growing enrollments. **But we have to tell our story, and it has to be true.**

Western can be a place students choose because it is somewhere they are supported in new and innovative ways, where they can see many pathways to success, and where diversity and creativity ground institutional identity. People go where they are valued. They go where they are inspired.

## **We work better when we work together; many eyes make for a stronger vision.**

- **Accountability**

We will hold each other accountable

- **Access**

We will engage and resist silos

- **Focus**

We will make decisions with our goals in mind

- **Understanding**

We will operate with empathy and consideration

**Make a Change.  
Make a Difference.  
Make it WOU.**

# Questions?

You all know that I am a rural person, from a farming background. And one of the many things you learn growing up on a farm is that to make things grow, you need good soil, you need water, and you need sunlight. We have these things at Western. We have a beautiful campus; we have intelligent & dedicated employees, and we have systems of support for students. Our students grow here: They enter degree programs that open up career pathways, that open up new ideas and innovations. We provide access to education that transforms the trajectories of lives and communities, that says yes when so often the answer has been no.

Over the weekend I was thinking about what thought I wanted to leave you all with, how I wanted you to hear that we are in a moment of needed change. And I realized that this campus is a reflection of the people here. So many of our students, so many of us, have faced struggles in life. Many of our students have faced barrier after barrier along their journeys. They have struggled economically, they have doubted themselves, they have struggled with basic needs and mental health, they have seen door after door closed. But still they persist. Still, they look to us for the support and opportunity they seek. And we will do whatever we can to make sure they have a hand to grab when they need it. A way up rather than a way down.

We've also faced the trauma of a global pandemic where we saw loved ones sick and dying. Communities lost elders, carriers of language and knowledge, mentors. We lost human connection, physical contact, personal support structures. Our children lost learning opportunities and saw yet another way to be afraid in school. But still we persevere. Still, we find ways to come together. Despite the struggles, this university, like the people who make it up, is strong. I came here because of you and because of the positive outlook you maintain in spite of the difficulties you have faced and that we now face together.



There is a fine line between concern and hope. Things will take time to turn around, and there will be more frustrations and challenges. But the strength to reach our goals is here. I feel it every day on this campus. So, I hope you are as hopeful as I am. I hope that you see our struggles as moments that teach us how to be better, to see better, to do better. This is who we are. This is WOU. And this is personal for me. Let's start getting it done.

Thank you and go wolves.